

Remarks at a Veterans Day Ceremony in Arlington, Virginia
November 11, 2012

Thank you so much. Please, everybody, be seated. Good morning, everyone.

Thank you, Secretary Shinseki, for a lifetime of service to our Nation and for being such a tireless advocate on behalf of America's veterans, including your fellow Vietnam veterans.

To Rick Delaney; to Vice President Biden; to Admiral Winnefeld; Major General Linnington; our outstanding veteran service organizations; our men and women in uniform—Active, Guard, and Reserve; and most of all, to the proud veterans and family members joining us in this sacred place: It is truly a privilege and an honor to be with all of you here today.

Each year, on the 11th day of the 11th month, we pause—as a nation and as a people—to pay tribute to you, to thank you, to honor you: the heroes, over the generations, who have served this country of ours with distinction.

And moments ago, I laid a wreath to remember every servicemember who has ever worn our Nation's uniform. And this day, first and foremost, belongs to them and their loved ones: to the father and mother, the husband and wife, the brother and sister, the comrade and the friend who, when we leave here today, will continue to walk these quiet hills and kneel before the final resting place of those they cherished most.

On behalf of the American people, I say to you that the memory of your loved one carries on not just in your hearts, but in ours as well. And I assure you that their sacrifice will never be forgotten.

For it is in that sacrifice that we see the enduring spirit of America. Since even before our founding, we have been blessed with an unbroken chain of patriots who have always come forward to serve. Whenever America has come under attack, you've risen to her defense. Whenever our freedoms have come under assault, you've responded with resolve. Time and again, at home and abroad, you and your families have sacrificed to protect that powerful promise that all of us hold so dear: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Today a proud Nation expresses our gratitude. But we do so mindful that no ceremony or parade, no hug or handshake, is enough to truly honor that service. For that, we must do more. For that, we must commit—this day and every day—to serving you as well as you've served us.

When I spoke here 3 years ago, I spoke about today's generation of servicemembers: this 9/11 generation who stepped forward after the towers fell and, in the years since, have stepped into history, writing one of the greatest chapters of military service our country has ever known.

You toppled a dictator and battled an insurgency in Iraq. You pushed back the Taliban and decimated Al Qaida in Afghanistan. You delivered justice to Usama bin Laden. Tour after tour, year after year, you and your families have done all that this country has asked. You've done that and more.

Three years ago, I promised your generation that when your tour comes to an end, when you see our flag, when you touch our soil, you'll be welcomed home to an America that will forever fight for you, just as hard as you've fought for us. And so long as I have the honor of

serving as your Commander in Chief, that is the promise that we will never stop working to keep.

This is the first Veterans Day in a decade in which there are no American troops fighting and dying in Iraq. Thirty-three thousand of our troops have now returned from Afghanistan, and the transition there is underway. After a decade of war, our heroes are coming home. And over the next few years, more than a million servicemembers will transition back to civilian life. They'll take off their uniforms and take on a new and lasting role. They will be veterans.

As they come home, it falls to us, their fellow citizens, to be there for them and their families, not just now, but always, not just for the first few years, but for as long as they walk this Earth.

To this day, we still care for a child of a Civil War veteran. To this day, we still care for over a hundred spouses and children of the men who fought in the Spanish-American War. Just last year, I came here to pay tribute as Frank Buckles, the last remaining American veteran of World War I, was laid to rest. Frank stepped up and served in World War I for 2 years. But the United States of America kept its commitment to serve him for many decades that followed.

So long after the battles end, long after our heroes come home, we stay by their side. That's who we are. And that's who we'll be for today's returning servicemembers and their families, because no one who fights for this country overseas should ever have to fight for a job or a roof over their head or the care that they have earned when they come home.

We know the most urgent task many of you face is finding a new way to serve. That's why we've made it a priority to help you find jobs worthy of your incredible skills and talents. That's why, thanks to the hard work of Michelle and Jill Biden, some of our most patriotic businesses have hired or trained 125,000 veterans and military spouses. It's why we're transforming, for the first time in decades, how the military transitions servicemembers from the battlefield to the workplace. And because you deserve to share in the opportunities you defend, we are making sure that the post-9/11 GI bill stays strong so you can earn a college education and pursue your dreams.

If you find yourself struggling with the wounds of war—such as posttraumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injuries—we'll be there as well, with the care and treatment that you need. No veteran should have to wait months or years for the benefits that you've earned, so we will continue to attack the claims backlog. We won't let up. *[Applause]* We will not let up. And as we mark the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam war, we have secured new disability benefits for Vietnam-era veterans exposed to agent orange. You needed it, you fought for it, and we got it done.

That's what we do in America. We take care of our own. We take care of our veterans. We take care of your families. Not just by saluting you on one day, once a year, but by fighting for you and your families every day of every year. That's our obligation—a sacred obligation—to all of you.

And it's an obligation that we gladly accept for Americans like Petty Officer Taylor Morris. Six months ago, Taylor was serving our Nation in Afghanistan. And as a member of an explosive ordnance disposal team, his job was one of the most dangerous there is: to lead the way through territory littered with hidden explosives, to clear the way for his brothers in arms.

On May 3, while out on patrol, Taylor stepped on an IED. The blast threw him into the air. And when he hit the ground, Taylor realized that both his legs were gone. And his left arm. And his right hand.

But as Taylor lay there, fully conscious, bleeding to death, he cautioned the medics to wait before rushing his way. He feared another IED was nearby. Taylor's concern wasn't for his own life, it was for theirs.

Eventually, they cleared the area. They tended to Taylor's wounds. They carried him off the battlefield. And days later, Taylor was carried into Walter Reed, where he became only the fifth American treated there to survive the amputation of all four limbs.

Now, Taylor's recovery has been long. And it has been arduous. And it's captivated the Nation. A few months after the attack, with the help of prosthetics, the love and support of his family, and above all, his girlfriend Danielle, who never left his side, Taylor wasn't just walking again. In a video that went viral, the world watched he and Danielle dance again.

I've often said the most humbling part of my job is serving as Commander in Chief. And one of the reasons is that, every day, I get to meet heroes. I met Taylor at Walter Reed. And then in July, at the White House, I presented him with the Purple Heart. And right now hanging on a wall in the West Wing is a photo of that day, a photo of Taylor Morris smiling wide and standing tall.

I should point out that Taylor couldn't make it here today because he and Danielle are out kayaking. *[Laughter]* In Taylor we see the best of America: a spirit that says, when we get knocked down, we rise again. When times are tough, we come together. When one of us falters, we lift them up. In this country, we take care of our own, especially our veterans, who have served so bravely and sacrificed so selflessly in our name. And we carry on, knowing that our best days always lie ahead.

On this day, we thank all of our veterans from all of our war, not just for your service to this country, but for reminding us why America is and always will be the greatest nation on Earth.

God bless you. God bless our veterans. God bless our men and women in uniform. And God bless these United States of America. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:36 a.m. at Arlington National Cemetery. In his remarks, he referred to Richard J. Delaney, president of the national board of directors, Retired Enlisted Association; Maj. Gen. Michael S. Linnington, USA, commanding general, National Capital Region and Military District of Washington; Jill T. Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden; and Danielle Kelly, girlfriend of Petty Officer Taylor Morris, USN.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Veterans Day ceremony in Arlington, VA.

Locations: Arlington, VA.

Names: Biden, Jill T.; Biden, Joseph R., Jr.; Delaney, Richard J.; Kelly, Danielle; Linnington, Michael S.; Morris, Taylor; Obama, Michelle; Shinseki, Eric K.; Winnefeld, James A. "Sandy," Jr.

Subjects: Afghanistan : Former regime; Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Casualties; Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Armed Forces, U.S. : Military families; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Deployment; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers ::

Service and dedication; Decorations, medals, and awards : Purple Heart; Holidays and special observances : Veterans Day; Iraq : Insurgency and terrorist attacks; Iraq : U.S. and coalition forces, withdrawal; Terrorism : Al Qaida terrorist group; Terrorism : September 11, 2001, attacks; Veterans : Access to health and medical care; Veterans : Benefits; Veterans : Hiring incentives; Veterans Affairs, Department of : Secretary; Virginia : Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington; Virginia : President's visits; White House Office : Vice President.

DCPD Number: DCPD201200884.